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The New Pop Idol: Candy Now and Blag Dahlia?!

Dwarves frontman Blag Dahlia has recently ditched punk rock to explore his softer side with Candy Now, but it's only temporary. Dahlia fights a bad phone connection and let's us interrupt Obama's public address on health care to discuss Candy Now, the new Dwarves album and his aspirations of writing a musical.

- Corinne

So how'd the Candy Now project come about?

Candy Now came out great, you know. It was a long time in coming. It sort of started out as a solo thing of mine and kind of morphed into this idea of bringing in these people from this great band Persephone's Bees. It's a girl singer, Angelina [Moysov], who's got this neat, kind of exotic Russian voice. And then Tom Ayres who plays guitar in that band and sort of played everything on Candy Now. He does bass and guitar and keyboards, banjo, and just anything he can think of.

It sort of evolved into this cool, kind of three dimensional, weird Sonny and Cher, retro duet kind of thing.

But we're going to do our first actual rehearsal here on Saturday so we can hopefully play some shows. It's kind of fun. It's a new thing.

How'd you get hooked up with Angelina and the band?

Well I met them through a producer named Eric Valentine, who had produced a bunch of stuff of mine and we were friends. Then he produced Persephone's Bees' last record. So I just met them down there. I was really impressed with this band. It couldn't be more different than the Dwarves, y'know? It's sort of exotic light pop, really cool. I was just amazed at how well Tom played and how great Angelina sang.

I had all these songs around for years but I couldn't really do anything with them in the Dwarves. They were too kind of retro and too kind of soft. This seemed to give me a chance to work this material into a whole new thing. And Candy Now was born.

So you just had these songs for if it ever happened, just writing for nothing in particular?

Yeah, I mean, I just write a lot of songs. But a lot of times I don't have a format to plug something into. So it'll be some type of poppier idea but if it's not screaming "fuck" at 400 miles per hour then it's not really Dwarves. I have to look for other places to put it.

And it's fun to write songs for other people and do other stuff than try to plug it into some Nashville thing or something like that, which can be very frustrating. I just decided to make a band and produce it, kind of do the whole thing.

How long did it take to record that album since you already had everything written.

Well, yeah, it was weird. First I just played everything on acoustic guitar and I did about 30 songs. Then at times it was going to be a solo album, at times it was going to be an acoustic album, at times it was going to be a comedy funny album. There were all these different ideas.

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But as I started fleshing the tunes out more I found that it was working best as a retro pop record. So we kind of went down that path, me and Tom. After a while... years ago I had done a duet with Angelina called "Take Me To Your Leader" which was kind of a novelty, funny song. The idea being she's an alien, so I thought she'd be great because she has this Russian accent so it's like she's an alien from outer space with an exotic accent.

After we had a lot of this Candy Now stuff done with me singing, I thought it's not electric enough with just me singing; there's got to be some female counterpart here. There's got to be another story. So then it turned into this whole kind of narrative thing: these two people and their relationship. It was fun.

You have some songs on the album that are more specifically duets. Like there's some chatter on "Waiting Here For You." How much of that was adlibbed and how much was scripted, so to speak?

Great example of the fun part of this band because it was all adlibbed, none of that was planned. I had given Angelina the material and she hadn't bothered to learn it. When she showed up in the studio – the tape's rolling, I'm paying – and she doesn't know the song. I had to walk her through the song. I was just kind of joking about it as we went and making fun of her and stuff. And it winds up being this great take of the song. I mean, she's so talented she doesn't need a lot of rehearsal but everybody needs some rehearsal otherwise you're just kind of clueless about it.

And it is very Sonny and Cher, like you were saying.

Yeah, yeah, there's that real element of the girl can sing and the guy, you know, can't. It has that and it reminds me a little bit of Louis Prima and Keely Smith, they were kind of the original Sonny and Cher sort of thing. It's a team.

She's just funny. She's got a very sardonic sense of humor. She just makes me laugh, she's kind of funny and cynical, like I am. It was a good match.

You said you're getting ready to do some shows and practices. Is it going to be taking it on the road or just local California shows?

For the moment it'll just be local California, I would imagine. I would love it if something happened where we could go on the road. It's hard to say.

Right now I'm working on a new Dwarves record. It's like the first Dwarves record in five years. It's taken up all of my energy. We had this whole vision – it's called "The Dwarves Are Born Again." [It's] kind of the answer to our last record, "The Dwarves Must Die" album. It's cool. It's kind of more punk rock, more stripped down, more like back to the basics. I think a lot of our fans are going to like that better. I got the mellow stuff out of my system with Candy Now. This Dwarves thing is going to get really nasty.

After I make that I'm going to have to go out on the road with the Dwarves, which is a lot of fun and makes me money. So we'll see if we can bankroll a Candy Now tour. See what we can pull off.

I mean, I really think Candy Now is great for TV and movies. I'm hoping to get some TV and movie stuff cause I think it's good, kind of romantic retro music and it really works in that context.

It's definitely not as in your face as the Dwarves.

[laughs]

Do you think it'll be more "shocking" to your fans?

Yeah, that's definitely an issue. "Dwarves Must Die" was more shocking and the one before that was shocking, because we would throw in a death metal song or a techno metal song, there were hip hop songs on "Dwarves Must Die." [All of] these different styles. Sometimes it really pisses off your fans. I don't really get that. If we still do a bunch of really good punk rock, what do you care if we get off in some other directions? It's one thing when a band totally changes styles: they do an all hip hop record, or an all techno record, or whatever. But the way my ears work, I just like lots of different genres. And Candy Now is way different so I gave it a whole different name. I didn't call it a Dwarves record.

It's kind of weird; I would prefer if it went into the record store under "C" and people checked it out as a new, different band. I think a lot of people who don't like the Dwarves would really like it. But the way it's actually going out, people are filing it under "Dwarves." And then Dwarves fans are buying it. Some people go, "Oh, this is great! It's your songwriting and it's a whole different scenario and we love this." And some people are like, "Fuck this! It's real soft." What can you do?

These tunes were in me. I like old fashioned music and I like female vocals and I like

all kinds of stuff the Dwarves can't really do. I'm just sticking it out there and hoping people like it.

But as I say, I see it more as something that would really work in TV and movies. I don't know how much it works as your favorite new rock band.

Well it's definitely not "old fashioned" sounding. I don't remember any turntables in any '60s stuff.

Yeah, and that's it. Really, it's funny, because if you look back in the history of the Dwarves, that was our original influence. The first couple [of] Dwarves records were garage records where we were kind of a '60s revival band with a punk attitude. It kind of morphed into a more hardcore thing. But with me there's always been this real heavy '60s/'50s influence. That's definitely there in my stuff. You see that a lot more clearly in Candy Now.

To me there's just a thread in my songwriting, I can hear it; it all sounds retro to me. A song like "Backseat of My Car," which people consider the classic punk Dwarves from "Blood Guts And Pussy," that's just a '60s garage song. I think it's the same riff as "Don't Tread On Me," which was an old '60s garage song. So to me, it was always the same stuff but what kind of clothing you put on it.

You've also done a country album and now you've done this '60s inspired lounge album, are there any other genres or sounds you'd like to tackle? Whether it be with the Dwarves, Candy Now, or another project.

Well, talk about gay. I want to do a musical. I can use some of these songs I've already written because I think some of them would be really good for a musical. I've always been fascinated by musicals and I've always been into them, which is sort of the polar opposite of the Dwarves' shit. I don't know, I'm just a weird guy. I like to take things on their own terms. Like a good musical is a good thing, same way a good gangster rap record is a good thing and a good death metal record is a good thing. I like to pick things out that I like and try and do them real well. There's a lot of people making mediocre punk records but only the Dwarves make a Dwarves record.

I don't know what's going to come next except that – actually, I probably do know what's going to come next, which is over the last year or two I've been playing a lot of solo shows which is just me on acoustic guitar singing these kind of funny songs that are more like novelty songs, kind of like on Candy Now the song "Bitch I Love You." I sort of do a whole set of songs like that that are funny. My singing is just my singing [laughs] and my guitar playing's really bad but I think it's an amusing thing. I think the next thing I do is almost a comedy record and, again, people won't necessarily understand that but I just have to do what the next thing is. It's weird, it's hard to pigeonhole for marketing. But I like funny novelty songs with funny lyrics and not necessarily weighted down with a bunch of production.

I don't think anybody'll be surprised by that.

[laughs] I hope not. More than that, I hope they enjoy it.

Again, to me, the Dwarves was always a funny thing but to a lot of people they took it seriously. So, all right, cool. If you want to believe that this is what we're like fine, you know? [laughs]

Well if this isn't what you're like, we can just end the interview. So you talked about a new Dwarves album. What stage are you at with that?

We got about half the guitar down now. Hewhocannotbenamed did his part this week and that was a lot of fun. I even sang a little bit of it. I don't know, I guess you could say it's halfway recorded, which probably means it's maybe a quarter done. [laughs] Do a lot of crazy shit to it after it's recorded and then mix it.

Sounds good. Anything else you wanted to say?

You're asking when do I think it's going to come out?

I wasn't but sure!

[laughs] Oh, no, we don't have the best connection so it's kind of hard to hear. But I think I'm going to put it at coming out like February or March.

Sounds good. Is there anything else you want to add?

I just want to tell people go check out this Candy Now record. I think it's really good and it's the kind of record you can [listen to and] have sex with someone. It's enjoyable.

Well that sales pitch sells itself. That's all I got then.

[laughs] And for the Dwarves fans out there, don't worry, I haven't softened up. We're coming back with an extremely hard record called "The Dwarves Are Born Again."

And for the pop fans, go check out Persephone's Bees. It's a great, great pop band and together we made Candy Now.

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